



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 137

Tuesday, July 24, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Interfaith panel suspends work

A panel of Catholic and Jewish historians suspended its study of the Vatican's role during the Holocaust.

The group said Monday it decided on the move because of a "lack of positive response" from the Vatican to its request for more documents.

Seymour Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, one of the coordinators of the panel, expressed "deep disappointment" at the Vatican's lack of cooperation.

Israel kills bombing accomplice

Israeli police shot and killed a Palestinian who drove a would-be suicide bomber toward Haifa.

The bomber was apprehended Sunday and led police to an apartment where he had left an explosive device made up of 15 pipe bombs.

He then showed them where he had planned to blow himself up on a busy Haifa street.

The driver, identified as Islamic Jihad member Mustafa Yassin, was shot and killed Monday while trying to evade capture after Israeli undercover troops surrounded his house in a West Bank village.

A third member of the cell was arrested early Monday near Haifa.

Sharon booed by own party

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was booed by members of his Likud Party who disagreed with his policy of restraint in dealing with Palestinian terrorism.

During a speech to some 2,500 members of the Likud's Central Committee on Sunday night, Sharon tried to convince party members that he has not gone soft on terrorism.

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who also addressed the delegates, refrained from directly attacking Sharon.

But he nonetheless pitched himself as better able to fight Palestinian terror.

Netanyahu is considered a challenge to Sharon's leadership of the party, even though scheduled elections are two years off.

L.A. Jews rally for Israel

Some 7,000 people participated in an Israel solidarity rally in Los Angeles. [Page 4]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Cabinet votes to build in the Negev, but will new communities bloom there?

By Gil Sedan

NITZANA, Israel (JTA) — How does a barren strip of land in the northern Negev Desert tie in with last year's failed Camp David summit?

The answer lies partly with a man considered a legendary figure in the history of Israel.

Last week, Aryeh "Lova" Eliav stood in the heat of the day on a hill in the Negev.

"Right here, underneath me, we have the equivalent of the Sea of Galilee," he said. "The only region in the country which suffers no water problem is the Negev. Pretty soon we will be able to ship water from the south to the north."

His prediction might sound counter-intuitive, but Eliav, 79, a former secretary-general of the Labor Party, has some basis for his optimism.

He was referring to the huge Negev aquifer, an untouched water reservoir in a country suffering an acute and unprecedented water shortage.

"Some 50,000 Israelis could come down and settle here," Eliav said. "It is only a matter of will."

In the early 1950s, Eliav, under the guidance of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, orchestrated the settlement of the Lachish and Arad regions in the Negev with thousands of Israelis, turning Lachish into the granary of Israel and Arad into a prospering desert city.

Now Eliav is again in the midst of a political campaign for the Negev.

Here is where the story links to Camp David.

A year ago, then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered the Palestinians a portion of the Negev known as the Halutza sand dunes in exchange for Israeli settlement blocs in the West Bank.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat turned down the proposal, questioning the quality of the land Israel was offering.

Still, the offer created a precedent.

It was the first time that a portion of land within Israel's original 1948 borders was being bartered in political negotiations.

Last week, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government moved to prevent a repetition of the offer, as its ministers voted to build new Jewish communities in the Halutza dunes.

Halutza is one of the more beautiful spots of the northern Negev: It is some 400 square miles, the size of the Golan Heights, but pure desert.

The area is largely unused. Studies are performed here by the Nature Reserves Authority, and the Israel Defense Force uses the area for training purposes. It also is a destination for wealthy Israelis from the north, who come on weekends to test their four-wheel-drive jeeps.

Yossi Beilin, who served as justice minister in the Barak government, defended last year's offer to transfer Halutza to Palestinian control.

"This was simply the best alternative," said Beilin, who last year was one of the advocates for the land trade.

Beilin recalled that other options for such a trade — including an area east of the city of Beersheba bordering the Hebron mountains — are close to Israeli population centers.

"The advantage of Halutza was its emptiness," Beilin told JTA last week. "At Camp David and the subsequent Taba talks we were quite close to reaching an agreement on

MIDEAST FOCUS

Peres: More CIA monitors OK

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres left open the possibility that Israel would allow more CIA monitors to oversee a cease-fire with the Palestinians. U.S. officials are already "here anyway," Peres said.

"We have never limited the number of the Americans who think it is necessary to meet the challenge." It is not clear whether Prime Minister Ariel Sharon — who told members of the Likud Party on Sunday night that he would not agree to the deployment of observers — shares Peres' view.

Israel returns body to Lebanon

Israel returned the body of a Lebanese pilot it shot down in May. Red Cross representatives brought the body of Stephan Ohannis Nicolian across the Israel-Lebanon border on Monday.

Israeli officials said they feared Nicolian was flying toward a heavily populated area with the intention of crashing and killing Israelis. Israeli media suggested that Israel hoped the move would prompt Hezbollah officials to provide information about the three Israeli soldiers they kidnapped last October.

Arafat's guard admits to terror

Israel arrested a bodyguard of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat who admitted to carrying out terror attacks against Israelis. Enis Mahmoud Namoura holds the rank of second lieutenant in Arafat's special protection unit.

He told interrogators that he learned to make bombs in Algeria, where he was sent by the Palestinian Authority in 1995, Army Radio reported.

Israel calls in extremists

Israeli police called in two Jewish extremists for questioning after Israeli vigilantes killed three Palestinians, including an infant boy, in an attack last week near Hebron. The two said they would not show up for the questioning.

such an exchange." He blasted last week's Cabinet vote.

"This was simply another move by the present government to block any future options for a possible deal with the Palestinians," Beilin said. It is "sad that my friends in the Labor Party in the coalition fell into this trick."

However, Beilin's adversaries on this issue are not only his "friends" in the Cabinet, but also people from his own political school of thought — like Eliav.

Thirty years ago, Eliav was the first mainstream politician to call for a total Israeli withdrawal from territories conquered in the 1967 war, recognition of the PLO and the eventual recognition of an independent Palestinian state.

After he was forced to quit the Labor Party, he set up his own Shelli Party, which failed to win Israelis' hearts and minds.

For all intents and purposes, Eliav was the political role model for Beilin and other leading Israeli doves such as Yossi Sarid, leader of the Meretz Party.

When it comes to Halutza, however, Eliav overnight became a political ally of Avigdor Lieberman — the right-wing infrastructure minister who introduced the Cabinet proposal — and an opponent of the dovish Beilin.

Eliav long has called on Israelis to populate the Negev.

Fourteen years ago, he convinced the Jewish Agency for Israel and the regional council to set up a youth village here in Nitzana, at the southern tip of the Halutza sand dunes.

The village since has blossomed.

Even this summer, in the midst of the 10-month-old Palestinian uprising, it is hosting dozens of American Jewish youths who undergo paramilitary training.

But Eliav always has wanted to do more. He called for establishing within Halutza a new town, accompanied by several villages, that would attract thousands of Israelis to the south.

That dream has more chance of becoming a reality after last week's Cabinet vote.

Undermining those chances, however, is neglect of the region by successive Israeli governments.

Although 20 years have passed since communities were established in the area — mostly by evacuees from Sinai settlements that were abandoned after the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt — only 200 families live there today, which is a far cry from Eliav's vision.

Last week, in what turned out to be an uneasy confrontation, Beilin visited the region and met with Eliav in Nitzana.

Beilin suggested that the Cabinet vote was merely a political move to prevent Israel from turning over the region to the Palestinians.

He added that no one in the government seriously intended to build new communities there.

Eliav apparently took this personally.

"Don't do this to me, Yossi," he said. "Not to me, with my record, at my age."

Beilin, an architect of the Oslo peace accords, immediately apologized, saying he did not doubt Eliav's good intentions.

Just the same, Beilin did not change his opinion regarding the import of the Cabinet move. □

Challenge in Rabin death pardon withdrawn

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli legislator withdrew a petition challenging the release of Margalit Har-Shefi, after Israel's High Court said President Moshe Katsav had acted within his authority when he commuted her sentence.

Har-Shefi, sentenced to nine months in prison for failing to prevent the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, is due to be released from jail Aug. 10. □

Continental to resume Tel Aviv flight

NEW YORK (JTA) — Continental Airlines said it will resume a second daily nonstop flight between Newark and Tel Aviv starting in May 2002.

It cut the extra flight last year because of a drop in business caused by the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. □



Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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JEWISH WORLD

U.S. nuke salesman caught

A U.S. citizen convicted of selling nuclear arms parts to Israel was arrested in Spain after 16 years on the run.

Richard Kelly Smith, 71, escaped before being sentenced in the United States on 15 counts of exporting nuclear arms technology and 15 counts of falsification of documents.

Prior to his flight in 1985, Smith had been chairman of a Los Angeles-based company that developed microchips used in the firing mechanisms of nuclear weapons, according to police.

Lieberman: I've got faith plan

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) said he is developing his own version of legislation passed by the House of Representatives last week that would expand federal funding for religious charities' social service programs.

The House bill faces opposition from Lieberman and other Democrats because they say it would not prevent discrimination in hiring.

The junior Connecticut senator told Fox News on Sunday that he would write his own initiative to encourage religious-based organizations to help solve society's problems "in a constitutionally appropriate way."

Hillary presses Red Cross

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) sent Red Cross officials in Geneva a letter calling on the organization to accept Israel's Magen David Adom.

Israel's humanitarian relief movement uses a red star of David that has been barred from the Red Cross movement, which currently recognizes only the cross and crescent symbols.

British Jewish births down

Birth and marriage rates are falling among British Jews, according to a study by the umbrella organization that represents most British Jews.

There were 2,059 Jewish births in 1999, the latest year for which statistics are available, down from 2,673 in 1998, according to the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

There were 907 marriages in 2000, down from 1,017 the year before. Rates of divorce, burial and cremation rose slightly.

Shoah taboo-breaker dies

Israeli author Yehiel Dinur, who used the pen name K. Zetnik, died July 17 of cancer at his home in Tel Aviv at the age of 84, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

A survivor of Auschwitz, Dinur was one of the first Israeli authors to write about the Holocaust.

16TH MACCABIAH GAMES

With fireworks and X-ray scans, Maccabiah Games come to a close

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The 16th Maccabiah Games ended with a lot of fanfare, flaming batons and fireworks — and a sigh of relief from the organizers that the much-anticipated event had escaped mishap.

There were hundreds of police officers and soldiers surrounding the outdoor Jerusalem space where the event was held. In addition, X-ray scanners and metal detectors checked bags and bodies, aimed at making the attendees feel more secure.

This was the first time the Maccabiah opening and closing ceremonies were held in Jerusalem. Last week's opening event was at Teddy Stadium, in the city's southern corner, while the closing party was in the cavity of Sultan's Pool, a Herodian reservoir that looks up at the ancient walls of the Old City.

Despite the low turnout and unusual competitions — in some events every team won a medal, because there were only three teams — it seemed that the significance of this year's games was that they took place at all during such a tense time for Israel.

More than one delegation head said he would breathe more easily once his athletes were home safe and sound — but added he was glad they had attended this year's Games. "This was about solidarity, showing a deep connection to the state of Israel," said Richard Feldman, the delegation head for Great Britain, who brought 160 athletes instead of the usual 350 British delegates.

Indeed, that was the theme of the closing ceremony: unity and solidarity. "Am Eched" — or One Nation — and "We Are One," were both printed on the T-shirts worn by American athletes to the final event.

"This year's Maccabiah made a statement, and the athletes should feel proud," said Bob Spivack, president of the Philadelphia-based Maccabiah USA. "It's about more than sports."

After the bombing at the Dolphinarium disco in Tel Aviv at the beginning of June, several countries pulled out of the Maccabiah Games, despite pleas from Israel that they not award a victory to Palestinian terrorists.

The USA team almost canceled as well, which could have been fatal to the Games. The organization's executive committee urged world organizers to postpone the Games until 2002 for security reasons.

But after meeting with Israeli and Jewish leaders, such as Sports Minister Matan Vilnai and Canadian philanthropist Charles Bronfman, the Americans decided to attend.

At that point, countries had to scramble to find players, replace coaches and form teams. Yet despite fewer teams and athletes than in previous years, many participants said the level of competition was still high.

Israel blew away the rest of the field in the medal race, winning 96 gold, 74 silver and 74 bronze medals. The U.S. team came in second, with 21 gold, 23 silver and 30 bronze medals. The Israeli team — used to the security situation in their native land — was the largest, but its member athletes also were considered among the most skilled and competitive.

With this year's competition safely behind them, some are setting their sights on the future.

"We need to start planning now for the next Games in four years," said Mark Berman, a coach for the Israeli softball team. "My view is that this continues to serve a purpose. It's bonding for Jewish athletes, and I'm encouraged that so many individuals made a statement and showed up for the Maccabiah."

It didn't seem as if the athletes were ready to leave after Monday night's closing ceremony.

They stomped their feet, waved colored flashlights and hooted their way through the show, which included belly dancers, the Israel Defense Force choir performing disco numbers and a helicopter bearing the Maccabiah flame.

In return, the athletes were thanked and applauded for their decision to compete.

"We're grateful to the athletes, because without them we wouldn't have had the Maccabiah at all," said Oudi Recanati, chairman of the Maccabi World Union and one of the sponsors of the 16th Games, shortened to seven days from the usual 10. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

College studies programs make some bullish about FSU Jewish life*By Lev Gorodetsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — Since the fall of communism here in 1991, a difficult question has lingered: Is there a future for Jewish life in the former Soviet Union?

Judging from the renaissance of Jewish education here, some people answer this question with a definitive yes.

"The future of the community hangs on what is happening in the Jewish schools and higher education institutions and they are thriving. I see here creativity and dynamism," says Jerry Hochbaum, executive vice president of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

"Here in Russia, the schools are building the society."

Hochbaum, whose group has invested heavily in Jewish life here, spoke to JTA at a meeting of the group's Executive Committee in Moscow earlier this month.

While some might disagree — arguing that the roughly 1.5 to 2 million Jews remaining in the former Soviet Union would be better off living in Israel or elsewhere — Hochbaum's group gathered ample evidence to support his claim as they met with the region's Jewish leaders, scholars and teachers.

Foundation leaders watched a graduation ceremony for students receiving degrees in Jewish studies from Project Judaica, a joint venture of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and the Moscow-based Russian State University for the Humanities.

The scene, which marked the 10th anniversary and fourth graduating class of Project Judaica showed the existence of a thriving Jewish academic institution, one that would have been impossible only a few years ago. The project is partially funded by the Memorial Foundation — and has received money from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

When David Fishman came to Moscow in August 1991 to negotiate the plan for Project Judaica, it was during the coup against then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Representatives of the Russian State University for the Humanities were concerned they might soon be arrested.

"Nobody could have imagined those days that we would have a developed Jewish university institution here," said Fishman, the project's creator.

Since the founding of Project Judaica — the dean of Moscow's university-level Jewish institutions — nearly 50 students have graduated from the program, including many non-Jews.

Ironically, many of them now live in the United States, including at least half of the project's first graduating class, says Lev Krichevsky, a member of that class who now lives in Philadelphia.

Many of the graduates outside the former Soviet Union still maintain ties to Jewish life in their homeland. Krichevsky, who previously served as JTA Moscow's correspondent, still travels back and forth for the Anti-Defamation League's Moscow office.

Project Judaica has provided a "great service" by training a "whole generation of people who have received Jewish knowledge," he says.

Hana Shchepetova, a Project Judaica graduate who just received a Memorial Foundation grant to pursue rabbinical studies at JTS, hopes eventually to return to Russia to teach Jewish studies

and help build the Conservative movement in Moscow.

In addition to Project Judaica, several universities now offer university-level Jewish studies programs.

The annual Russian university students' conference in Judaic studies, sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, recently took place here.

"When you see 150 papers presented and the estimated number of presentations for the next year is 300, it makes you optimistic," says Mikhail Krutikov, a Russian-born professor of Yiddish at Oxford University. □

(JTA Staff Writer Peter Ephross contributed to this report.)

Amid a sea of blue and white, Los Angeles Jews rally for Israel*By Tom Tugend*

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Waving Israeli flags and elongated blue-and-white balloons, a crowd of 7,000 demonstrators rallied at a major artery here to demonstrate their solidarity with Israel.

Among the speakers at Sunday's event, which drew California Gov. Gray Davis and L.A. Mayor James Hahn, were two young Israelis who lost classmates in the June 1 suicide bombing by a Palestinian terrorist outside a Tel Aviv disco.

Referring to the two speakers, John Fishel, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, said, "In a time like this, it is imperative that they do not feel alone."

One of the two, 17-year old Olga Bakharakh, student council president at the Shevach Moffet School in Tel Aviv, delivered perhaps the most moving remarks at the rally, which was held to show support for Israel during ten months of violence with the Palestinians.

Seven of Bakharakh's schoolmates, all Russian-born immigrants, were killed and 11 wounded in the disco bombing.

She eulogized her fellow students and the 14 others killed in the attack.

"We do not wish for revenge. We wish for life and hope," Bakharakh said. "We wish to grow and evolve, to learn and to have fun, to serve and to work. We wish to live a full life."

Davis told the crowd, "In time of tragedy and triumph, California has always stood with Israel," adding that "you can't have a cease-fire when one side ceases and the other side fires."

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres addressed the crowd via phone from Jerusalem, affirming that "Israel is willing to pay a high price for peace," but "we will not surrender."

Peres's talk was marred by poor transmission and a small but vociferous group from the Jewish Defense League who chanted, "Peres must go."

The L.A. Jewish federation sponsored the rally, together with 60 organizations representing a cross-section of the Jewish community. Particularly noticeable was the presence of Russian immigrant organizations.

Occasional heckling from Jewish militants and Palestinians and their sympathizers disturbed but did not disrupt the rally.

After the event, the two sides confronted each other, with some 50 Arabs and their supporters facing about 100 Israelis and American Jews, separated by a heavy police cordon.

The sides shouted obscenities at each other in Arabic, Hebrew and English.

Other participants ended the event with impromptu hora dances and the chant "Am Yisrael Chai" — The People of Israel Live. □